TOMMY'S WISHES COME TRUE

From Aunt Edna
To Hanny
On his 8th Birthday

In the brook were fish to be caught

THE WISHING-STONE STORIES

Tommy's Wishes Come True

By

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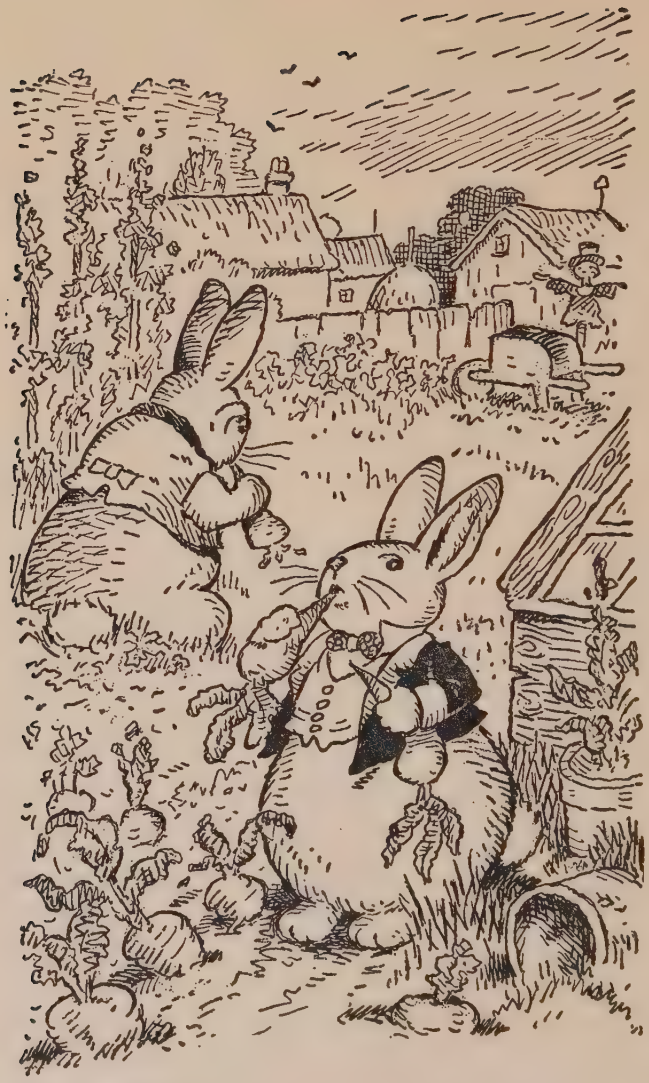

With Peter he made visits to a garden

CHAPTER ONE

WHY PETER RABBIT HAS ONE LESS ENEMY

PETER RABBIT was happy. There was no question about that. You had only to watch him a few minutes to know it. He couldn't hide that happiness any more than the sun at midday can hide when there are no clouds in the sky. Happiness seemed to fairly shoot from his long heels as they twinkled merrily this way and that way through the dear Old Briar-patch.

Peter was doing crazy things. He was so happy that he was foolish. Hap-

piness, you know, is the only excuse for foolishness. And Peter was foolish, very, very foolish. He would suddenly jump into the air, kick his long heels, dart off to one side, change his mind and dart the other way, run in a circle, and then abruptly plump himself down under a bush and sit as still as if he couldn't move. Then, without any warning at all, he would cut up some other funny antic.

He was so foolish and so funny that finally Tommy, who, unseen by Peter, was watching him, laughed aloud. Perhaps Peter doesn't like being laughed at. Most people don't. It may be Peter was a little bit uncertain as to why he was being laughed at. Anyway, with a sudden thump of his stout hind-feet, he scampered out of sight along

one of his private little paths which led into the very thickest tangle in the dear Old Briar-patch.

"I'll have to come over here with my gun and get that rabbit for my dinner," said Tommy, as he trudged homeward. "Probably though, if I have a gun, I won't see him at all. It's funny how a fellow is forever seeing things when he hasn't got a gun, and when he goes hunting he never sees anything!"

Tommy had come to the great gray stone which was his favorite resting-place. He sat down from sheer force of habit. Somehow, he never could get past that stone without sitting on it for a few minutes. It seemed to just beg to be sat on. He was still thinking of Peter Rabbit.

"I wonder what made him feel so

frisky," thought Tommy. Then he laughed aloud once more as he remembered how comical Peter had looked. It must be fun to feel as happy as all that. Without once thinking of where he was, Tommy exclaimed aloud: "I declare, I wish I were a rabbit!"

He was. His wish had come true. Just as quick as that, he found himself a rabbit. You see, he had been sitting on the wishing-stone. If he had remembered, perhaps, he wouldn't have wished. But he had forgotten, and now here he was, looking as if he might very well be own brother to Peter Rabbit.

Not only did he look like Peter, but he felt like him. Anyway, he felt a crazy impulse to run and jump and do foolish things, and he did them. He

just couldn't help doing them. It was his way of showing how good he felt, just as shouting is a boy's way, and singing is the way of a bird.

But in the very midst of one of his wildest whirls, he heard a sound that brought him up short, as still as a stone. It was the sound of a heavy thump, and it came from the direction of the Old Briar-patch. Tommy didn't need to be told that it was a signal, a signal from Peter Rabbit to all other rabbits within hearing distance. He didn't know just the meaning of that signal, and, because he didn't, he just sat still.

Now it happens that that was exactly what that signal meant—to sit tight and not move. Peter had seen something that to him looked very suspicious. So on general principles he had signaled,

and then had himself sat perfectly still until he should discover if there was any real danger.

Tommy didn't know this, but being a rabbit now, he felt as a rabbit feels, and, from the second he heard that thump, he was as frightened as he had been happy a minute before. And being frightened, yet not knowing of what he was afraid, he sat absolutely still, listening with all his might, and looking this way and that, as best he could, without moving his head. And all the time, he worked his nose up and down, up and down, as all rabbits do, and tested the air for strange smells.

Presently Tommy heard behind him a sound that filled him with terrible fear. It was a loud sniff, sniff. Rolling his eyes back so that he could look behind

without turning his head, he saw a dog sniffing and snuffing in the grass. Now that dog wasn't very big as dogs go, but he was so much bigger than even the largest rabbit that to Tommy he looked like a giant. The terrible fear that filled him clutched at Tommy's heart until it seemed as if it would stop beating.

What should he do, sit still or run? Somehow he was afraid to do either. Just then the matter was settled for him. "*Thump, thump, thump!*" the signal came along the ground from the Old Briar-patch, and almost any one would have known just by the short sharp sound that those thumps meant "Run!" At just the same instant, the dog caught the scent of Tommy full and strong. With a roar of his great voice he sprang forward, his nose in Tommy's tracks.

Tommy waited no longer. With a great bound he leaped forward in the direction of the Old Briar-patch. How he did run! A dozen bounds brought him to the Old Briar-patch, and there just before him was a tiny path under the brambles. He didn't stop to question how it came there or who had made it. He dodged in and scurried along it to the very middle of the Old Briar-patch. Then he stopped to listen and look.

The dog had just reached the edge of the briars. He knew where Tommy had gone. Of course he knew. His nose told him that. He thrust his head in at the entrance to the little path and tried to crawl in. But the sly old brambles tore his long tender ears, and he yelped

with pain now instead of with the excitement of the chase. Then he backed out, whining and yelping. He ran around the edge of the Old Briar-patch looking for some place where he could get in more comfortably. But there was no place, and after a while he gave up and went off.

Tommy sat right where he was until he was quite sure that the dog had gone. When he *was* quite sure, he started to explore the dear Old Briar-patch, for he was very curious to see what it is was like in there. He found little paths leading in all directions. Some of them led right through the very thickest tangles of ugly looking brambles, and Tommy found that he could run along these with never a fear of a single scratch. And as he hopped along, he knew that here

he was safe, absolutely safe from most of his enemies, for no one bigger than he could possibly get through those briars without being terribly scratched.

So it was with a very comfortable feeling that Tommy peered out through the brambles and watched that annoying dog trot off in disgust. He felt that never, so long as he was within running distance of the dear Old Briar-patch, would he be afraid of a dog.

Right into the midst of his pleasant thoughts broke a rude "*Thump, thump, thump!*" It wasn't a danger-signal this time. That is, it didn't mean "Run for your life." Tommy was very sure of that. And yet it might be a kind of danger-signal, too. It all depended on what Tommy decided to do.

There it was again—"*Thump, thump,*

thump!" It had an ugly, threatening sound. Tommy knew just as well as if there had been spoken words instead of mere thumps on the ground that he was being warned to get out of the Old Briar-patch—that he had no right there, because it belonged to some one else.

But Tommy had no intention of leaving such a fine place, such a beautifully safe place, unless he had to, and no mere thumps on the ground could make him believe that. He could thump himself. He did. Those long hind-feet of his were just made for thumping. When he hit the ground with them, he did it with a will, and the thumps he made sounded just as ugly and threatening as the other fellow's, and he knew that the other fellow knew exactly what they meant—

"I'll do as I please! Put me out if you can!"

It was very clear that this was just what the other proposed to do if his thumps meant anything at all. Presently Tommy saw a trim, neat-looking rabbit in a little open space, and it was something of a relief to find that he was about Tommy's own size.

"If I can't whip him, he certainly can't whip me," thought Tommy, and straightway thumped, "I'm coming," in reply to the stranger's angry demand that he come out and fight.

Now the stranger was none other than Peter Rabbit, and he was very indignant. He considered that he owned the dear Old Briar-patch. He was perfectly willing that any other rabbit should find safety there in time of danger, but when

the danger was past, they must get out. Tommy hadn't; therefore he must be driven out.

Now if Tommy had been himself, instead of a rabbit, never, never would he have dreamed of fighting as he was preparing to fight now—by biting and kicking, particularly kicking. But for a rabbit, kicking was quite the correct and proper thing. In fact, it was the only way to fight.

So instead of coming together head-on, Tommy and Peter approached each other in queer little half-sidewise rushes, each watching for a chance to use his stout hind-feet. Suddenly Peter rushed, jumped, and — well, when Tommy picked himself up, he felt very much as a boy feels when he has been tackled and thrown in a football game.

Certainly Peter's hind-legs were in good working order.

Just a minute later Tommy's chance came and Peter was sent sprawling. Like a flash, Tommy was after him, biting and pulling out little bunches of soft fur. So they fought until at last they were so out of wind and so tired that there was no fight left in either. Then they lay and panted for breath, and quite suddenly they forgot their quarrel. Each knew that he couldn't whip the other; and, that being so, what was the use of fighting?

"I suppose this Old Briar-patch is big enough for both of us," said Peter, after a little.

"I'll live on one side, and you live on the other," replied Tommy. And so it was agreed.

In three things Tommy found that, as a rabbit, he was not unlike Tommy the boy. These three were appetite, curiosity, and a decided preference for pleasure rather than work. Tommy felt as if he lived to eat instead of eating to live. He wanted to eat most of the time. It seemed as if he never could get his stomach really full.

There was one satisfaction, and that was that he never had to look very far for something to eat. There were clover and grass just outside the Briar-patch, — all he wanted for the taking. There were certain tender-leaved plants for a change, not to mention tender bark from young trees and bushes. With Peter he made occasional visits to a not too distant garden, where they fairly reveled in goodies.

These visits were in the nature of adventure. It seemed to Tommy that not even Danny Meadow-Mouse had so many enemies as he and Peter had. They used to talk it over sometimes.

"It isn't fair," said Peter in a grieved tone. "We don't hurt anybody. We don't do the least bit of harm to any one, and yet it isn't safe for us to play two minutes outside the dear Old Briar-patch without keeping watch. No, sir, it isn't fair! There's Redtail the Hawk watching this very minute from way up there in the sky. He looks as if he were just sailing round and round for the fun of it; but he isn't. He's just watching for you or me to get one too many jumps away from these old briars. Then down he'll come like a shot. Now what harm

have we ever done Redtail or any of his family? Tell me that."

Of course Tommy couldn't tell him that, and so Peter went on: "When I was a baby, I came very near to finding out just how far it is from Mr. Blacksnake's mouth to his stomach by the inside passage, and all that saved me was the interference of a boy, who set me free. Now that I'm grown, I'm not afraid of Mr. Blacksnake, — though I keep out of his way, — but I have to keep on the watch all the time for that boy!"

"The same one?" asked Tommy.

"The very same!" replied Peter. "He's forever setting his dog after me and trying to get a shot at me with his terrible gun. Yet I've never done *him* any harm, — nor the dog either."

"It's very curious," said Tommy, not knowing what else to say.

"It seems to me there ought to be some time when it is reasonably safe for an honest rabbit to go abroad," continued Peter, who, now that he was started, seemed bound to make the worst of his troubles. "At night, I cannot even dance in the moonlight without all the time looking one way for Reddy Fox and another for Hooty the Owl."

"It's a good thing that the Briar-patch is always safe," said Tommy, because he could think of nothing else to say.

"But it isn't!" snapped Peter. "I wish to goodness it was! Now there's — listen!" Peter sat very still with his ears pricked forward. Something very like a look of fear grew and grew in his eyes. Tommy sat quite as still and lis-

tened with all his might. Presently he heard a faint rustling. It sounded as if it was in one of the little paths through the Briar-patch. Yes, it surely was! And it was drawing nearer! Tommy gathered himself together for instant flight, and a strange fear gripped his heart.

"It's Billy Mink!" gasped Peter. "If he follows you, don't run into a hole in the ground, or into a hollow log, whatever you do! Keep going! He'll get tired after a while. There he is — run!"

Peter bounded off one way and Tommy another. After a few jumps, Tommy squatted to make sure whether or not he was being followed. He saw a slim, dark form slipping through the brambles, and he knew that Billy Mink was following Peter. Tommy couldn't

help a tiny sigh of relief. He was sorry for Peter; but Peter knew every path and twist and turn, while he didn't. It was a great deal better that Peter should be the one to try to fool Billy Mink.

So Tommy sat perfectly still and watched. He saw Peter twist and turn, run in a circle, criss-cross, run back on his own trail, and make a break by leaping far to one side. He saw Billy Mink follow every twist and turn, his nose in Peter's tracks. When he reached the place where Peter had broken the trail, he ran in ever widening circles until he picked it up again, and once more Peter was on the run.

Tommy felt little cold shivers chase up and down his back as he watched how surely and persistently Billy Mink followed. And then — he hardly knew how

it happened — Peter had jumped right over him, and there was Billy Mink coming! There was nothing to do but run, and Tommy ran. He doubled and twisted and played all the tricks he had seen Peter play, and then at last, when he was beginning to get quite tired, he played the same trick on Peter that had seemed so dreadful when Peter played it on him; he led Billy Mink straight to where Peter was sitting, and once more Peter was the hunted.

But Billy Mink was getting tired. After a little, he gave up and went in quest of something more easily caught.

Peter came back to where Tommy was sitting.

"Billy Mink's a tough customer to get rid of alone, but, with some one to change off with, it is no trick at all!"

said he. "It wouldn't work so well with his cousin, Shadow the Weasel. He's the one I *am* afraid of. I think we should be safer if we had some new paths; what do you think?"

Tommy confessed that he thought so too. It would have been very much easier to have dodged Billy Mink if there had been a few more cross paths.

"We better make them before we need them more than we did this time," said Peter; and, as this was just plain, sound, rabbit common sense, Tommy was forced to agree.

And so it was that he learned that a rabbit must work if he would live long and be happy. He didn't think of it in just this way as he patiently cut paths through the brambles and tangles of bush and vine. It was fear, just plain

fear, that was driving him. And even this drove him to work only by spells. Between times, when he wasn't eating, he sat squatting under a bush just lazily dreaming, but always ready to run for his life.

In the moonlight he and Peter loved to gambol and play in some open space where there was room to jump and dance; but, even in the midst of these joyous times, they must need sit up every minute or so to stop, look, and listen for danger. It was at night, too, that they wandered farthest from the Old Briar-patch.

Once they met Bobby Coon, and Peter warned Tommy never to allow Bobby to get him cornered. And once they met Jimmy Skunk, who paid no attention to them at all, but went right on about his

business. It was hard to believe that he was another to be warned against; but so Peter said, and Peter ought to know if anybody did.

So Tommy learned to be ever on the watch. He learned to take note of his neighbors. He could tell by the sound of his voice when Sammy Jay was watching Reddy Fox, and when he saw a hunter. When Blacky the Crow was on guard, he knew that he was reasonably safe from surprise. At least once a day, but more often several times a day, he had a narrow escape. But he grew used to it, and, as soon as a fright was over, he forgot it. It was the only way to do.

As he learned more and more how to watch, and to care for himself, he grew bolder. Curiosity led him farther and

Reddy Fox was between him and his castle

farther from the Briar-patch. And then, one day he discovered that Reddy Fox was between him and it. There was nothing to do but to run and twist and double and dodge. Every trick he had learned he tried in vain. He was in the open, and Reddy was too wise to be fooled.

He was right at Tommy's heels now, and with every jump Tommy expected to feel those cruel white teeth. Just ahead was a great rock. If he could reach that, perhaps there might be a crack in it big enough for a frightened little rabbit to squeeze into, or a hole under it where he might find safety.

He was almost up to it. Would he be able to make it? One jump! He could hear Reddy panting. Two jumps! He could feel Reddy's breath. Three

jumps! He was on the rock! and — slowly Tommy rubbed his eyes. Reddy Fox was nowhere to be seen. Of course not! No fox would be foolish enough to come near a *boy* sitting in plain sight. Tommy looked over to the Old Briar-patch. That at least was real. Slowly he walked over to it. Peering under the bushes, he saw Peter Rabbit squatting perfectly still, yet ready to run.

"You don't need to, Peter," said he. "You don't need to. You can cut one boy off that long list of enemies you are always watching for. You see, I know just how you feel, Peter!"

He walked around to the other side of the Briar-patch, and, stooping down, thumped the ground once with his hand. There was an answering thump from the

spot where he had seen Peter Rabbit. Tommy smiled.

"We're friends, Peter," said he, "and it's all on account of the wishing-stone. I'll never hunt you again. My! I wouldn't be a rabbit for anything in the world. Being a boy is good enough for me!"

CHAPTER TWO

WHY TOMMY BECAME A FRIEND OF RED SQUIRRELS

"I DON'T see what Sis wants to string this stuff all over the house for, just because it happens to be Christmas!" grumbled Tommy, as he sat on a big stone and idly kicked at a pile of beautiful ground-pine and fragrant balsam boughs. "It's the best day for skating we've had yet, and here I am missing a whole morning of it, and so tired that most likely I won't feel like going this afternoon!"

Now Tommy knew perfectly well that if his mother said that he could go, nothing could keep him away from the

pond that afternoon. He was a little tired, perhaps, but not nearly so tired as he tried to think he was. Gathering Christmas greens was work of course. But when you come right down to it, there is work about almost everything, even skating. The chief difference between work and pleasure is the difference between "must" and "want to." When you *must* do a thing it becomes work; when you *want* to do a thing it becomes pleasure.

Right down deep inside, where his honest self lives, Tommy was glad that there was going to be a green wreath in each of the front windows, and that over the doors and pictures there would be sweet-smelling balsam. Without them, why, Christmas wouldn't be Christmasy at all! And really it had been fun gath-

ering those greens. He wouldn't admit it, but it had. He wouldn't have missed it for the world. It was only that it had to be done just when he wanted to do something else. And so he tried to feel grieved and persecuted, and to forget that Christmas was only two days off.

He sat on the big gray stone and looked across the Green Meadows, no longer green but covered with the whitest and lightest of snow-blankets, across the Old Pasture, not one whit less beautiful, to the Green Forest, and he sighed. It was a deep, heavy sigh. It was the sigh of a self-made martyr.

As if in reply, he heard the sharp voice of Chatterer the Red Squirrel. It rang out clear and loud on the frosty air, and it was very plain that, whatever troubles others might have, Chatterer was very

well satisfied with the world in general and himself in particular. Just now he was racing along the fence, stopping at every post to sit up and tell all the world that he was there and didn't care who knew it. Presently his sharp eyes spied Tommy.

Chatterer stopped short in the middle of a rail and looked at Tommy very hard. Then he barked at him, jerking his tail with every syllable. Tommy didn't move.

Chatterer jumped down from the fence and came nearer. Every foot or so he paused and barked, and his bark was such a funny mixture of nervousness and excitement and curiosity and sauciness, not to say impudence, that finally Tommy laughed right out. He just couldn't help it.

Back to the fence rushed Chatterer, and scampered up to the top of a post. Once sure of the safety of this retreat, he faced Tommy and began to scold as fast as his tongue could go. Of course Tommy couldn't understand what Chatterer was saying, but he could guess. He was telling Tommy just what he thought of a boy who would sit moping on such a beautiful day, and only two days before Christmas at that!

My, how his tongue did fly! When he had had his say to the full, he gave a final whisk of his tail and scampered off in the direction of the Old Orchard. And, as he went, it seemed to Tommy as if he looked back with the sauciest kind of a twinkle in his eyes, as much as to say, "You deserve all I've said, but I don't really mean it!"

Tommy watched him, a lively little red spot against the white background, and, as he watched, the smile gradually faded away. It never would do at all to go home in good spirits after raising such a fuss as he had when he started out. So, to make himself feel as badly as he felt that he ought to feel, Tommy sighed dolefully.

"Oh, but you're lucky!" said he, as Chatterer's sharp voice floated over to him from the Old Orchard. "You don't have to do a blessed thing unless you want to! All you have to do is to eat and sleep and have a good time. It must be fun. I wish I were a squirrel!"

Right then something happened. It happened all in a flash, just as it had happened to Tommy before. One minute he was a boy, a discontented

boy, sitting on a big gray stone on the edge of the Green Meadows, and the next minute he wasn't a boy at all! You see, when he made that wish, he had quite forgotten that he was sitting on the wishing-stone. Now he no longer had to guess at what Chatterer was saying. Not a bit of it. He knew.

He talked the same language himself. In short, he was a red squirrel, and in two minutes had forgotten that he ever had been a boy.

How good it felt to be free and know that he could do just as he pleased! His first impulse was to race over to the Old Orchard and make the acquaintance of Chatterer. Then he thought better of it. Something inside him seemed to tell him that he had no business there — that the Old Orchard was not big

enough for two red squirrels, and that, as Chatterer had gone there first, it really belonged to him in a way.

He felt quite sure of it when he had replied to Chatterer's sharp voice, and had been told in no uncertain tones that the best thing he could do would be to run right back where he had come from.

Of course, he couldn't do that, so he decided to do the next best thing — run over to the Green Forest and see what there was to do there. He hopped up on the rail fence and whisked along the top rail.

What fun it was! He didn't have a care in the world. All he had to do was to eat, drink, and have a good time. Ha! who was that coming along behind him? Was it Chatterer? It looked something like him, yet different some-

how. Tommy sat quite still watching the stranger, and, as he watched, a curious terror began to creep over him.

The stranger wasn't Chatterer! No, indeed, he wasn't even a squirrel! He was too long and slim, and his tail was different. He was Shadow the Weasel! Tommy didn't have to be told that. Although he never had seen Shadow before, he knew without being told. For a minute he couldn't move. Then, his heart beating with fear until it seemed as if it would burst, he fled along the fence toward the Green Forest, and now he didn't stop at the posts when he came to them. His one thought was to get away, away as far as ever he could; for in the eyes of Shadow the Weasel he had seen death.

Up the nearest tree he raced and hid,

Tommy sat quite still watching the stranger

A sudden harsh scream startled him so that he dropped the nut

clinging close to the trunk near the top, staring down with eyes fairly bulging with fright. Swiftly, yet without seeming to hurry, Shadow the Weasel came straight to the tree in which Tommy was hiding, his nose in Tommy's tracks in the way that a hound follows a rabbit or a fox. At the foot of the tree he stopped just a second and looked up. Then he began to climb.

At the first scratch of his claws on the bark Tommy raced out along a branch and leaped across to the next tree. Then, in a great panic, he went on from tree to tree, taking desperate chances in his long leaps. In the whole of his little being he had room for but one feeling, and that was fear — fear of that savage pitiless pursuer.

He had run a long way before he

realized that he was no longer being followed. The fact is, Shadow had found other game, easier to catch, and had given up. Now, just as soon as Tommy realized that Shadow the Weasel was no longer on his track, he straightway forgot his fear. In fact it was just as if he never had had a fright, for that is the law of Mother Nature with her little people of the wild. So presently Tommy was once more as happy and care-free as before.

In a big chestnut-tree just ahead of him he could see Happy Jack the Gray Squirrel; and Happy Jack was very busy about something. Perhaps he had a storehouse there. The very thought made Tommy hungry. Once more he hid, but this time not in fear. He hid so that he could watch Happy Jack.

Not a sound did he make as he peered out from his hiding-place.

Happy Jack was a long time in that hollow limb! It seemed as if he never would come out. So Tommy started on to look for more mischief, for he was bubbling over with good spirits and felt that he must do something.

Presently, quite by accident, he discovered another hoard of nuts, mostly acorns, neatly tucked away in a crotch of a big tree. Of course he sampled them. "What fun!" thought he. "I don't know who they belong to, and I don't care. From now on, they are going to belong to me."

He started to carry them away, but a sudden harsh scream close to him startled him so that he dropped the nut he had in his mouth. He dodged behind

the trunk of the tree just in time to escape the dash of an angry bird in a brilliant blue suit with white and black trimmings.

"Thief! thief! thief! Leave my acorns alone!" screamed Sammy Jay, anger making his voice harsher than ever.

Round and round the trunk of the tree Tommy dodged, chattering back in reply to the sharp tongue of the angry bird. It was exciting without being very dangerous. After a while, however, it grew tiresome, and, watching his chance, he slipped over to another tree and into a hole made by Drummer the Woodpecker. Sammy Jay didn't see where he had disappeared, and, after hunting in vain, gave up and began to carry his acorns away to a new hiding-place.

Tommy's eyes sparkled with mischief as he watched. By and by he would have a hunt for it! It would be fun!

When Sammy Jay had hidden the last acorn and flown away, Tommy came out. He didn't feel like hunting for those acorns just then, so he scampered up in a tall hemlock-tree, and, just out of sheer good spirits and because he could see no danger near, he called sharply that all within hearing might know that he was about.

Almost instantly he received a reply from not far away. It was an angry warning to keep away from that part of the Green Forest, because he had no business there! It was the voice of Chatterer. Tommy replied just as angrily that he would stay if he wanted to. Then they barked and chattered at

each other for a long time. Gradually Chatterer came nearer. Finally he was in the very next tree. He stopped there long enough to tell Tommy all that he would do to him when he caught him, and at the end he jumped across to Tommy's tree.

Tommy waited no longer. He wasn't ready to fight. In the first place he knew that Chatterer probably had lived there a long time, and so was partly right in saying that Tommy had no business there. Then Chatterer looked a little the bigger and stronger. So Tommy nimbly ran out on a branch and leaped across to the next tree. In a flash Chatterer was after him, and then began a most exciting race through the tree-tops.

Tommy found that there were regular

squirrel highways through the tree-tops, and along these he raced at top speed, Chatterer at his heels, scolding and threatening. When he reached the edge of the Green Forest, Tommy darted down the last tree, across the open space to the old stone wall and along this, Chatterer following.

Suddenly the anger in Chatterer's voice changed to a sharp cry of warning. Tommy scrambled into a crevice between two stones without stopping to inquire what the trouble was. When he peeped out, he saw a great bird sailing back and forth. In a few minutes it alighted on a near-by tree, and sat there so still that, if Tommy had not seen it alight, he never would have known it was there.

"Mr. Goshawk nearly got you that

time," said a voice very near at hand. Tommy turned to find Chatterer peeping out from another crevice in the old wall. "It won't be safe for us to show ourselves until he leaves," continued Chatterer. "It's getting so that an honest squirrel needs eyes in the back of his head to keep his skin whole, not to mention living out his natural life. Hello! here comes a boy, and that means more trouble. There's one good thing about it, and that is he'll frighten away that hawk."

Tommy looked, and sure enough there was a boy, and in his hands was an air-rifle. Tommy didn't know what it was, but Chatterer did.

"I wish that hawk would hurry up and fly so that we can run!" he sputtered. "The thing that boy carries

throws things, and they hurt. It isn't best to let him get too near when he has that with him. He seems to think it's fun to hurt us. I'd just like to bite him once and see if he thought *that* was fun! There goes that hawk. Come on now, we've got to run for it!"

Chatterer led the way and Tommy followed. He was frightened, but there wasn't that terror which had possessed him when Shadow the Weasel was after him. Something struck sharply against the wall just behind him. It frightened him into greater speed. Something struck just in front of him, and then something hit him so hard that just for a second he nearly lost his balance. It hurt dreadfully.

"Hurrah!" shouted the boy, "I hit him that time!" Then the boy started

to run after them so as to get a closer shot.

"We'll get up in the top of that big hemlock-tree and he won't be able to see us," panted Chatterer. "Did he hit you? That's too bad. It might have been worse though. If he had had one of those things that make a big noise and smoke we might not either of us be here now.

"Boys are hateful things. I don't see what fun they get out of frightening and hurting such little folks as you and me. They're brutes! That's what they are! When we get across that little open place, we can laugh at him. Come on now!"

Down from the end of the old wall Chatterer jumped and raced across to the foot of a big hemlock-tree, Tommy

at his heels. Up the tree they ran and hid close to the trunk where the branches were thick. They could peer down and see the boy, but he couldn't see them. He walked around the tree two or three times, and then shot up into the top to try to frighten the squirrels.

"Don't move!" whispered Chatterer. "He doesn't see us."

Tommy obeyed, although he felt as if he must run. His heart seemed to jump every time a bullet spatted in among the branches. It was dreadful to sit there and do nothing while being shot at, and not know but that the very next minute one of those little lead shot would hit. Tommy knew just how it would hurt if it did hit.

Presently the boy gave up and went off to torment some one else. No sooner

was his back fairly turned than Chatterer began to scold and jeer at him. Tommy joined him. It was just as if there never had been any danger. If that boy could have understood what they said, his ears would have burned.

Then Chatterer showed Tommy just what part of the Green Forest he claimed as his own, and also showed him a part that had belonged to another squirrel to whom something had happened, and suggested that Tommy take that for his. It wasn't as good as Chatterer's, but still it would do very well. Tommy took possession at once. Each agreed not to intrude on the other's territory. On common ground, that didn't belong to either of them, they would be the best of friends, but Tommy knew that if he went into Chatterer's part of the Green

Forest, he would have to fight, and he made up his mind that if any other squirrel came into *his* part of the Green Forest, there would be a fight. Suddenly he was very jealous of his new possession. He was hardly willing to leave it, when Chatterer suggested a visit to a near-by corn-crib for a feast of yellow corn.

Chatterer led the way. Tommy found that he was quite lame from the shot which had hit him, but he was soon racing after Chatterer again.

Along the old stone wall, then along a fence, up a maple-tree, and from there to the roof of the corn-crib, they scampered. Chatterer knew just where to get inside, and in a few minutes they were stuffing themselves with yellow corn. When they had eaten all that

they could hold, they stuffed their cheeks full and started back the way they had come.

Tommy went straight to his own part of the Green Forest, and there he hid his treasure, some in a hollow stump, and some under a little pile of leaves between the roots of a tree. All the time he watched sharply to make sure that no one saw him. While looking for new hiding-places, his nose told him to dig. There, buried under the leaves, he found nuts hidden by the one who had lived there before him. There must be many more hidden there, and it would be great fun hunting for them. Doubtless he would find as many as if he had hidden them himself, for he had seen that Chatterer didn't know where he had put a tenth part of the things *he* had hidden.

He just trusted to his nose to help him get them again.

He found a splendid nest made of leaves and strips of inner bark in the hollow stub of a big branch of a chestnut-tree, and he made up his mind that there was where he would sleep. Then he ran over to see Chatterer again. He found him scolding at a cat who watched him with yellow, unblinking eyes. Chatterer would run down the trunk of the tree almost to the ground, and there scold and call names as fast as his tongue could go. Then he would run back up to the lowest branch and scold from there. The next time he would go a little farther down. Finally he leaped to the ground, and raced across to another tree. The cat sprang, but was just too late. Chatterer jeered at her.

Then he began the same thing over again, and kept at it until finally the cat gave up and left in disgust. It had been exciting, but Tommy shivered at the thought of what might have happened.

"Ever try that with a fox?" asked Chatterer.

"No," replied Tommy.

"I have!" boasted Chatterer. "But I've seen squirrels caught doing it," he said. "Still, I suppose one may as well be caught by a fox as by a hawk."

"Did you see that weasel this morning?" asked Tommy.

Chatterer actually shivered as he replied: "Yes, I saw him after you. It's a wonder he didn't get you. You're lucky! I was lucky myself this morning, for a mink went right past where I

was hiding. Life is nothing but one jump after another these days. It seems as if, when one has worked as hard as I did last fall to store up enough food to keep me all winter, I ought to be allowed to enjoy it in comfort.

"Those who sleep all winter, like Johnny Chuck, have a mighty easy time of it. They don't know when they are well off. Still, I'd hate to miss all the excitement and fun of life. I would rather jump for my life twenty times a day as I have to, and know that I'm alive, than to be alive and not know it. See that dog down there? I hate dogs! I'm going to tell him so."

Off raced Chatterer to bark and scold at a little black-and-white dog which paid no attention to him at all. The shadows were creeping through the trees,

and Tommy began to think of his nest. He looked once more at Chatterer, who was racing along the top of the old wall scolding at the dog. Suddenly what seemed like merely a darker shadow swept over Chatterer, and, when it had passed, he had vanished. For once, that fatal once, he had been careless. Hooty the Owl had caught him. Tommy shivered. He was frightened and cold. He would get to his nest as quickly as he could. He leaped down to a great gray stone, and — behold, he wasn't a squirrel at all! He was just a boy sitting on a big stone, with a heap of Christmas greens at his feet.

He shivered, for he was cold. Then he jumped up and stamped his feet and threshed his arms. A million diamond points glittered in the white meadows

where the snow crystals splintered the sunbeams. From the Old Orchard sounded the sharp scolding chirr and cough of Chatterer the Red Squirrel.

Tommy listened and slowly a smile widened. "Hooty didn't get you after all!" he muttered. Then in a minute he added: "I'm glad of it. And you haven't anything more to fear from me. You won't believe it, but you haven't. You may be mischievous, but I guess you have troubles enough without me adding to them. Oh, but I'm glad I'm not a squirrel! Being a boy's good enough for me, 'specially 'long 'bout Christmas time. I guess Sis will be tickled with these greens. But it's queer what happens when I sit down on this old rock!"

He frowned at it as if he couldn't

understand it at all. Then he gathered up his load of greens, and, with the merriest of whistles, trudged homeward. And to this day Chatterer the Red Squirrel cannot understand how it came about that from that Christmas he and Tommy became fast friends. But they did.

Perhaps the wishing-stone could tell if it would.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PLEASURES AND TROUBLES OF BOBBY COON

TOMMY was trudging down to the corn-field, and his freckled face was rather sober. At least it was sober for him, considering why he was on his way to the corn-field. It wasn't to work. If it had been, his sober look would have been quite easy to understand. The fact is, Tommy was going on an errand that once would have filled him with joy and sent him whistling all the way.

"Coons are raising mischief down in the corn! You'd better get your traps out and see if you can catch the thieving

little rascals. Go down and look the ground over, and see what you think," his father had said to him at noon that day.

So here he was on his way to look for signs of Bobby Coon, and, if the truth were known, actually hoping that he wouldn't find them! There had been a time when he would have been all excitement over his quest, and eager to find the tell-tale tracks where Bobby Coon went into and out of the corn-field. Then he would have hurried home for his traps in great glee, or instead would have planned to watch with his gun for Bobby that very night.

But now he had no such feelings. Somehow, he had come to regard his little wild neighbors in a wholly different light. He no longer desired to do them

harm. Ever since he had begun to learn what their real lives were like, by wishing himself one of them as he sat on the old wishing-stone, he had cared less and less to hunt and frighten them and more and more to try to make friends with them.

His teacher would have said that he had a "sympathetic understanding" of them, and then probably would have had to explain to Tommy what that meant — that he knew just how they felt and had learned to look at things from their point of view. And it was true. He had put away his gun and traps. He no longer desired to kill. He liked to hunt for these little wild people as much as ever, perhaps more, but it was in order to make friends with them, and to find

out more about their ways and habits, instead of to kill them.

So it was that he didn't like his present errand. On the brow of the hill that overlooked the corn-field he stopped for a minute to look down on the broad acres of long-leaved stalks standing row on row, row on row, like a well drilled army. He thought of the long hours he had spent among them toiling with his hoe in the hot sunshine when the swimming-hole was calling to him, and a sudden sense of pride swept over him. The great sturdy plants no longer needed his hoe to keep the weeds down. The ears had filled out and were in the milk now.

"Seems as if we could spare what little a coon wants," muttered Tommy, as he gazed down on the field. "Of course,

if there is a whole family of 'em, something's got to be done, but I don't believe one coon can eat enough to do much harm. Dad promised me a share in the crop, when it's harvested, to pay for my work. It isn't likely to be very much, and goodness knows I want every penny of it; but I guess, if that coon isn't doing too much damage, I can pay for it."

Tommy's face lighted up at the idea. It was going to take self-denial on his part, but it was a way out. The thought chased the soberness from his face and put a spring into his hitherto reluctant steps. He went at once to that part of the corn-field nearest the Green Forest. It did not take him long to discover the evidences that a raccoon, or perhaps more than one, had been taking toll. Here a stalk less sturdy than its neigh-

bors had been pulled down, the husks stripped from the ears, and a few mouthfuls of the milky grains taken. There a stalk had been climbed and an ear stripped and bitten into.

"Wasteful little beggar!" muttered Tommy. "Why can't you be content to take an ear at a time and clean it up? Then there would be no kick coming. Dad wouldn't mind if you filled your little tummy every night, if you didn't spoil ten times as much as you eat. Ha! here are your tracks. Now we'll see where you come in."

Except for the sharp tips of the toes, the tracks were not unlike the print of a tiny hand, and there was no mistaking them for the tracks of any other animal. Tommy studied them until he was sure that all were made by one rac-

coon, and he was convinced that he had but one to deal with.

At length he found the place where the animal was in the habit of entering the field. There was just the suggestion of a path through the grass in the direction of the Green Forest. It was very clear that Bobby Coon came and went regularly that way, and of course this was the place to set a trap. Tommy's face clouded again at the thought.

"I believe I'll go up to the old wishing-stone and think it out," he muttered.

So he headed for the familiar old wishing-stone that overlooked the Green Meadows and the corn-field, and was not so very far from the Green Forest; and when he reached it, he sat down. It is doubtful if Tommy ever got past

that old stone without sitting down on it. This time he had no intention of wishing himself into anything, yet hardly had he sat down when he did. You see his thoughts were all of Bobby Coon, and so, without stopping to think where he was, he said to no one in particular: "There are some things I want to know about raccoons. I wish I could be one long enough to find out."

Tommy's wish had come true. He was no longer Tommy the boy, but Tommy the coon. He was a thick-set, rather clumsy-looking gray-coated fellow, with a black ringed tail and a black band across the eyes. His ears were sharp, and his face was not unlike that of Reddy Fox in its outline. His toes were long and bare; and when he

walked, it was with his whole foot on the ground as a man does and as a bear does. In fact, although he didn't know it, he was own cousin to Buster Bear.

Tommy's home was a hollow tree with the entrance high up. Inside he had a comfortable bed, and there he spent his days sleeping away the long hours of sunshine. Night was the time he liked best to be abroad, and then he roamed far and wide without fear.

Reddy Fox he was not afraid of at all. In fact there was no one he feared much but man, and in the darkness of the night he thought he need not even fear him.

Tommy's hollow tree was in a swamp through which flowed a brook, and it was Tommy's delight to explore this brook, sometimes up, sometimes down. In it

were fish to be caught, and Tommy as a boy never delighted in fishing more than did Tommy as a coon. On moonlight nights he would steal softly up to a quiet pool and, on the very edge of it, possess himself in patience, as a good fisherman should. Presently a careless fish would swim within reach. A swift scoop with a black little paw with five sharp little hooks extended — and the fish would be high and dry on the shore. It was great fun.

Sometimes he would visit marshy places where the frogs were making the night noisy with a mighty chorus. This was the easiest kind of hunting. He had only to locate the spot from which one of those voices issued, steal softly up, and there was one less singer, though the voice would hardly be missed in the

great chorus. Occasionally he would take a hint from Jerry Muskrat and, where the water was very shallow, dig out a few mussels or fresh-water clams.

At other times, just by way of varying his bill of fare, he would go hunting. This was less certain of results but exciting; and when successful, the reward was great. Especially was this so in the nesting season, and many a good meal of eggs did Tommy have, to say nothing of tender young birds. Occasionally he prowled through the tree-tops in hope of surprising a family of young squirrels in their sleep. None knew better than he that in the light of day he could not catch them; but at night, when they could not see and he could, it was another matter.

But fish, meat, and eggs were only a

part of Tommy's diet. Fruit, berries, and nuts in their season were quite as much to his liking, not to mention certain tender roots. One day, quite by chance while he was exploring a hollow tree, he discovered that it already had tenants and that they were makers of the most delicious sweets he ever had tasted. In short, he almost made himself sick on wild honey, his long hair protecting him from the little lances of the bees. After that he kept a sharp eye out for sweets and so discovered that bumble-bees make their nests in the ground; and that while they contained a scant supply of honey, there was enough as a rule to make it worth while to dig them open.

So Tommy grew fat and lazy. There was plenty to eat without working very hard for it, and he shuffled about in the

Green Forest and along the Laughing Brook, eating whatever tempted him and having a good time generally.

He dearly loved to play along the edge of the water and was as tickled as a child with anything bright and shiny. Once he found a bit of tin shining in the moonlight and spent most of the remainder of that night playing with it. About one thing he was very particular. If he had meat of any kind and there was water near, he always washed it carefully before eating. In fact Tommy was very neat. It was born in him.

Sometimes daylight caught him far from his hollow tree. Then he would look for an old nest of a hawk or crow and curl up in it to sleep the day away. If none was handy and he could find no hollow tree or stump, he would climb a

big tree and stretch himself flat along one of the big limbs and there sleep until the Black Shadows came creeping through the Green Forest.

Once in a while he would be discovered by the sharp eyes of Sammy Jay or Blacky the Crow, and then life would be made miserable for him until he would be glad to wake up and seek some hiding-place where they could not see him. It was for this reason chiefly that he always tried to get back to his own snug den by the time jolly, round, red Mr. Sun shook his rosy blankets off and began his daily climb up in the blue, blue sky.

One night he met Bobby Coon himself.

"Where do you live?" asked Tommy.

Once in a while he would be discovered

"Over on the Mountain," replied Bobby.

"In a hollow tree?" asked Tommy.

"No. Oh, my, no!" replied Bobby. "I've got the nicest den in a ledge of rock. No more hollow trees for me."

"Why not?" demanded Tommy.

"They aren't safe," retorted Bobby. "I used to live in a hollow tree, but I've learned better. I guess you've never been hunted. When you've been nearly choked to death by smoke in your hollow tree, or had it cut down with you in it and barely escaped by the skin of your teeth, you won't think so much of hollow trees. Give me a good rocky den every time."

"But where does the smoke come from, and why should my hollow tree

be cut down?" asked Tommy, to whom this was all new and very strange.

"Hunters," replied Bobby briefly. "You wait until the cool weather comes and you'll find out what I mean."

"But who are the hunters and what do they hunt us for?" persisted Tommy.

"My, but you are innocent!" retorted Bobby. "They are those two-legged creatures called men, and I don't know what they hunt us for. They just do, that's all. They seem to think it's fun. I wish one of them would have to fight for *his* life. Perhaps he wouldn't see so much fun in it then. It was last fall that they drove me out of my hollow tree, and they pretty nearly got me, too. But they won't do it this year! You take my advice and get a den in the rocks. Then you can laugh at them."

"But what will they hunt me for? I haven't done them any harm," persisted Tommy.

"That doesn't have anything to do with it," retorted Bobby. "They do it for *fun*. Have you tried the corn yet? It's perfectly delicious. Come on and we'll have a feast."

Now of course Tommy was ready for a feast. The very thought of it put everything else out of his head. He shuffled along behind Bobby Coon through the Green Forest, across a little stretch of meadow, and under the bars of a fence into a corn-field. For a minute he sat and watched Bobby. It was Tommy's first visit to a corn-field and he didn't know just what to do. But Bobby did. Oh, yes, Bobby did. He stood up on his hind legs and pulled one of the more

slender stalks down until he could get at the lowest ear. Then he stripped off the husk and took a huge bite of the tender milky kernels.

"*Um-m-m*," said Bobby Coon, and took another.

Tommy waited no longer. He found a stalk for himself, and two minutes later he was stuffing himself with the most delicious meal he ever had tasted. At least he thought so then. He forgot all about dens and hunters. He had no thought for anything but the feast before him. Here was plenty and to spare.

He dropped the ear he was eating and climbed a big stalk to strip another ear. The first one was good but this one was better. Perhaps a third would be better still. So he sampled a third. The

moon flooded the corn-field with silvery light. It was just the kind of a night that all raccoons love, and in that field of plenty Bobby and Tommy were perfectly happy. They did not know that they were in mischief. How should they? The corn was no more than other green things growing of which they were free to help themselves. So they wandered about, taking here a bite and there a bite and wasting many times as much as they ate.

Suddenly, in the midst of their good time, there sounded the yelp of a dog, and there was something about it that sent a chill of fright along Tommy's backbone. It was an excited and joyous yelp and yet there was something threatening in it. It was followed by another yelp, and then another, each

more excited than the others, and then it broke into a full-throated roar in which there was something fierce and terrifying. It was coming nearer through the corn. Tommy looked over to where he had last seen Bobby Coon. He wasn't there, but a rustling of the corn-stalks beyond told him that Bobby was running, running for his life.

Tommy was in a panic. He never had had to run for his life before. Where should he go? To the Green Forest of course, where there were trees to climb. In a tree he would be safe. Then he heard another sound, the shout of a man. He remembered what Bobby Coon had said about trees and a new fear took possession of him. While he still hesitated, the dog passed, only a few yards away in the corn. Tommy

heard the rustle of the stalks and the roar of his savage voice. And then suddenly he knew that the dog was not after him. He was following the tracks of Bobby Coon.

Swiftly Tommy stole through the corn and ran across the bit of meadow, his heart in his mouth, to the great black bulk of the Green Forest. He ran swiftly, surprisingly so for such a clumsy-looking fellow. How friendly the tall trees looked! They seemed to promise safety. It was hard to believe that Bobby Coon was right and that they did not. He kept on, nor stopped until he was in his own hollow tree. The voice of the dog came to him, growing fainter and fainter in the direction of the mountain, and finally ceased alto-

gether. He wondered if Bobby reached his den and was safe.

Of one thing Tommy was certain: that corn-field was no place for him. So he kept away from it and tried not to think of how good that milky corn had tasted. So the summer passed and the fall came with falling leaves and sharp frosty nights. They gave Tommy even more of an appetite, though there had been nothing the matter with that before. He grew fatter and fatter so that it made him puff to run. Unknown to him, Old Mother Nature was preparing him for the long winter sleep.

By this time the memory of the dog and of what Bobby Coon had said about hollow trees had almost dropped from his mind. He was concerned over noth-

ing but filling his stomach and enjoying those frosty moonlight nights. He interfered with no one and no one interfered with him.

One night he had gone down to the Laughing Brook, fishing. Without warning, there broke out on the still air the horrid sound of that yelping dog. Tommy listened for just a minute. This time it was *his* trail that dog was following. There could be no doubt about it. Tommy turned and ran swiftly. But he was fat and heavy, and he could hear the dog gaining rapidly. Straight for his hollow tree fled Tommy, and even as he reached it the dog was almost at his heels. Up the tree scrambled Tommy and, from the safe vantage of a big limb which was the threshold of his home, he looked

down. The dog was leaping up against the base of the tree excitedly and his voice had changed. He was barking. A feeling of relief swept over Tommy. The dog could not climb; he was safe.

But presently there were new sounds in the Green Forest, the shouting of men. Lights twinkled and drew nearer. Staring down from the edge of his hole, Tommy saw eager, cruel faces looking up. With a terrible fear gripping his heart he crept down into his bed. Presently the tree shook with the jar of an ax. Blow followed blow. The tree vibrated to each blow and the vibrations passed through Tommy's body so that it shook, but it shook still more with a nameless and terrible fear.

At last there was a sharp cracking sound. Tommy felt himself falling

through space. He remembered what Bobby Coon had told him, and he wondered if he would be lucky enough to escape as Bobby did. Then he shut his eyes tight, waiting for the crash when the tree should strike the ground.

When he opened his eyes, he was—just Tommy sitting on the wishing-stone overlooking the Green Meadows. His face was wet with perspiration. Was it from the sun beating down upon him, or was it from the fear that had gripped him when that tree began to fall? A shudder ran over him at the memory. He looked over to the corn-field where he had found the tracks of Bobby Coon and the mischief he had wrought. What was he to do about it? Somehow strangely his sympathy was with Bobby.

"He doesn't know any better," mut-

tered Tommy. "He thinks that corn belongs to him as much as to anybody else, and there isn't any reason why he shouldn't think so. It isn't fair to trap him or kill him for something he doesn't know he shouldn't do. If he just knew enough to eat what he wants and not waste so much, I guess there wouldn't be any trouble. He's just like a lot of folks who have so much they don't know what to do with it, only they know better than to waste it, and he doesn't. I know what I'll do. I'll take Bowser down there to-night and give him a scare. I'll give him such a scare that he won't dare come back until the corn is so hard he won't want it. That's what I'll do!

"My, it must be awful to think you're safe and then find you're trapped! I guess I won't ever hunt coons any more.

I used to think it was fun, but I never thought how the coon must feel. Now I know and — and — well, a live coon is a lot more interesting than a dead one, anyway. Funny what I find out on this old wishing-stone. If I keep on, I won't want to hunt anything any more."

Tommy got up, stretched, began to whistle as if there was a load off his mind, and started for home, still whistling.

And his whistle was good to hear.

CHAPTER FOUR

HOW TOMMY ENVIED HONKER THE GOOSE

THE feel of spring was in the air. The sound of it filled Tommy's ears. The smell of it filled his nostrils and caused him to take long, deep breaths. The sight of it gladdened his eyes, and the joy of it thrilled his heart. For the spring, you know, has really arrived only when it can be felt, heard, smelled, and seen, and has the power to fill all living things with abounding joy and happiness.

Winter had been long in going. It seemed to Tommy that it never would go. He liked winter. Oh, yes, Tommy liked winter! He liked to skate

and slide, to build snow forts and houses, and make snow men. He liked to put on his snow-shoes and tramp through the Green Forest, for many are the secrets of the summer which the winter reveals to those with eyes to see, and Tommy was trying to train his eyes to be of that kind. But when it was time for winter to go, he wanted it to go quickly, and it hadn't. It had dragged on and dragged on. To be sure, there had been a few springlike days, but they had been only an aggravation.

But this day was different, and Tommy knew that at last spring had arrived. It was not that it was long past time, for it was now almost April. It was something more. It was just a something that, throbbing all through him, told him that this time there was no

mistake — spring was really here. There was a softness in the touch of gentle Sister Southwind which was like a caress. From over in the Green Forest came the gurgle of the Laughing Brook, and mingling with it was the soft whistle of Winsome Bluebird, the cheery song of Welcome Robin, the joyous greeting of Little Friend the Song-sparrow, the clear lilt of Carol the Meadow-lark, the sweet love call of Tommy Tit, the Chickadee, and under all a subdued murmur, sensed rather than really heard, as of a gentle stirring of reawakened life. So Tommy *heard* the spring.

And in each long breath he drew there was the odor of damp, warm soil such as the earth gives up only at this season. And so Tommy *smelled* the spring.

And looking from the top of the hill

above the wishing-stone down across the Green Meadows to the Old Pasture and beyond to the Purple Hills, he saw all as through a soft and beautiful haze, which was neither fog nor smoke, but as if old Mother Nature had drawn an exquisite veil over the face of the earth until it should be made beautiful. And so Tommy *saw* the spring.

He whistled joyously as he tramped down to the dear old wishing-stone and sat down on it, his hands clasped about his crossed knees. Seasons came and went, but the wishing-stone, the great, gray stone which overlooked the Green Meadows, remained always the same. How many, many winters it must have seen go, and how many, many springs it must have seen come, some early and

some, like this one, late, but all beautiful!

In all the years it had been there how many of old Mother Nature's children, little people in fur, little people in feathers, little people in scaly suits, and little people with neither fur nor feathers nor scales, but with gauzy or beautifully colored wings, or crawling with many feet, must have rested there just as he was doing now!

Somehow Tommy always got to thinking of these little people whenever he sat on the wishing-stone. From it he had watched many of them and learned much of their ways. But he had learned still more by wishing. That seems queer, but it was so. He had wished that he was a meadow-mouse, and no sooner had he wished it than he had

been one. In turn he had wished himself into a red squirrel, a rabbit, and a mink, and he had lived their lives; had learned how they work and play; how sometimes they have plenty, but quite as often go hungry, sometimes very hungry, and how always they are under the shadow of fear, and the price of life is eternal watchfulness.

"I suppose some people would say that I fell asleep and dreamed it all, but I know better," said Tommy. "If they were dreams, why don't I have the same kind at home in bed? But it's only out here on this old stone when I wish I were something that I become it. So of course it isn't a dream! Now I think of it, every single time I've wished myself one of these little animals, it has been because I thought they had

a better and an easier time than I do, and every time I've been mighty glad that I'm just what I am. I wonder ——" He paused a minute, for a sudden thought had popped into his head. "I wonder," he finished, "if those wishes came true just to teach me not to be discontented. I wonder if a wish would come true if I weren't discontented!"

He was still wondering when, floating down out of the sky, came a clear "*Honk*, *honk*, *honk*, *k'honk*, *honk*, *honk*, *k'honk*." Instantly Tommy turned his freckled face and eager eyes skyward.

"Wild geese!" he exclaimed.

"*Honk*, *honk*, *k'honk*, *honk!*" The sound was loud and clear, but it seemed to come from nowhere in particular and everywhere in general. Of course it came from somewhere up in the sky, but

it was very hard to place it as from any particular part. It was a good two minutes before Tommy's eyes, sharp as they were, found what he was looking for — a black wedge moving across the sky, a wedge made up of little, black living spots. At least they looked little. That was because they were so high, so very high in the sky.

He knew that each of those black spots was a great, broad-winged bird — a Canada goose. He could see the long outstretched necks as tiny black lines. One behind another in two long lines which met in a letter V, like well-drilled soldiers maintaining perfect formation, the leader at the apex of the V, and behind him each bird a given distance from the one in front, they moved steadily across the sky, straight into the north.

"*Honk, honk, k'honk, honk, k'honk, k'honk, honk!*" There was something indescribably thrilling in the sound. It made the blood leap and race through Tommy's veins. Long after the living wedge had passed beyond his vision those clarion notes rang in his ears — "*honk, honk, k'honk, honk, k'honk, k'honk, honk!*" They were at once a challenge and a call to the wild freedom of the great wilderness. They filled his heart with a great longing. It swelled and pulsed with a vast desire.

"Oh," he sighed, "it must be great to be able to fly like that. I would rather fly than do anything I know of. I envy old Honker in the lead there, I do. I wish I could join him this very minute!"

Of course that wish had slipped out unthinkingly. But that made no dif-

"It must be great to be able to fly like that"

All the time Honker was on guard

ference. Tommy had wished, and now here he was high in the air, no longer a boy, but a great bird, the last one in a long line of great birds beating the thin air with stout, tireless wings as they followed Honker, the leader, straight into the North. Far, far below lay the Great World. It seemed to Tommy that he had no part in it now. A fierce tumultuous joy surged through him and demanded expression. Spring had come, and he must tell those plodding creatures, mere specks, crawling on the distant earth. *Honk, honk, k'honk, honk, k'honk!*

Never in all his life had Tommy felt such a thrill as possessed him now. Looking down, he saw brown meadows and pastures showing just a hint of green here and there, green forests and bare

woodlands, silver threads, which he knew to be rivers, shining spots which were lakes and ponds, and villages which looked like toys.

Once they passed over a great city, but it did not look great at all. Seen through the murk of the smoke from many factory chimneys, it was not unlike an ant-hill which had been opened, — tiny black objects, which were really men, women, children, horses, and motor-cars, seeming to hurry aimlessly in all directions, for all the world like ants.

So all day they flew, crying the glad message of the spring to the crawling things below. Just a little while before the setting of the sun, Honker, the leader, slanted down toward a shining spot in the heart of a great forest, and the others followed. Rapidly the shining

spot grew in size until below them lay a pond far from the homes of men, and to the very middle of this Honker led the way, while the whole flock broke into excited gabbling, for they had flown far and were tired. With a splash Honker struck the water, and with splash after splash the others followed, Tommy the last, because, you know, he was at the end of one of those long lines.

Then for a while they rested, the wise old leader scanning the shores with keen eyes for possible danger. Satisfied that all was well, he gave a signal and led the way to a secluded cove where the water was shallow and the shore marshy. It was clear that he had been there before, and had come with a purpose. Slowly they swam, Honker well in the lead. necks held high, the eyes of all alert and

studying the nearing shore. There was no honking now, not a sound. To Tommy, in his inexperience, such watchfulness seemed needless. What possible danger could there be in such a lonely place? But he wisely kept his place and did as the others did.

At length they were close to shore, and Honker gave a low signal which meant that all was well. Instantly the formation was broken, and with a low, contented gabbling the flock began feeding on eel-grass, roots, and sedges from the mud at the bottom. For an hour they fed, then they swam about, or sat on the shore preening their feathers while the shadows deepened. But all the time Honker and some of the older ganders with eyes and ears alert were on guard. And when at last Tommy put his head

under his wing to sleep, a great content filled his heart.

The next day was much like the first. With break of day they had breakfasted, and then, at a signal from Honker, they had mounted up, up into the blue vault, and all day they had heralded the spring to the earth below as they flew into the north. So it was the next day and the next, wise old Honker leading them to some chosen secluded resting-place each night.

Gradually the face of the earth below changed. There were no more cities. The villages became smaller and farther between, and at last they saw no more, only here and there a lonely farm. Great forests and lakes succeeded each other, the air grew colder, but with his

thick coat of feathers Tommy minded it not at all.

Then, one day, they found they had outflown the spring. Below them the earth was still frozen and snow-covered. The ponds and lakes were still ice-bound. Reluctantly Honker turned back to their last stopping-place and there for a week they rested in peace and security, though not in contentment, for the call of the North, the Far North, with its nesting-grounds, was ever with them, and made them impatient and eager to be on their way. The daily flights were shorter now, and there were frequent rests of days at a time, for spring advanced slowly, and they must wait for the unlocking of the lakes and rivers. The forests changed; the trees became low and stunted. At last they

came to a vast region of bogs and swamps and marshes around shallow lakes and ponds, a great lonely wilderness, a mighty solitude. At least that is what Tommy would have thought it had he been a boy or a man instead of a smart young gander.

It was neither lonely nor a solitude to him now, but the haven which had been the object of those hundreds of miles of strong-winged flight. It was the nesting-ground. It was home! And how could it be lonely with flock after flock of his own kind coming in every hour of every day; with thousands of ducks pouring in in swift winged flight, and countless smaller birds, all intent on home-building?

The flock broke up into pairs, each intent on speedily securing a home of

their own. On the ground they made great nests of small sticks and dead grass with a soft lining of down. In each presently were four or five big eggs. And soon there were downy goslings — scores and scores of them — in the water with their mothers for the first swimming lesson.

Then the old birds had to be more vigilant than before, for there were dangers, many of them, even in that far wilderness: prowling foxes, hungry lynxes, crafty mink, hawks, fierce owls, each watching for the chance to dine on tender young goose. So the summer, short in that far northern region, passed, and the young birds grew until they were as large as their parents, and able to care for themselves.

Cold winds swept down out of the

frozen Arctic Ocean with warning that already winter had begun the southward march. Then began a great gathering of the geese, and a dividing into flocks, each with a chosen leader, chosen for his strength, his wisdom, and his ability to hold his leadership against all comers. Many a battle between ambitious young ganders and old leaders did Tommy see, but he wisely forbore to challenge old Honker, the leader who had led the way north, and when the latter gathered the flock for the journey he was one of the first to fall in line.

A thousand plus a thousand miles and more stretched before them as they turned to the south, but to the strength of their broad wings the distance was as nothing. But this was to be a very different journey from their trip north,

as Tommy soon found out. Then they had been urged on day by day by a great longing to reach their destination. Now in place of longing was regret. There was no joy in the going. They were going because they must. They had no choice. Winter had begun its southward march.

The flights were comparatively short, for where food was good they stayed until some subtle sense warned old Honker that it was time to be moving. It was when they had left the wilderness and reached the great farm-lands that they lingered longest. There in the stubble of the grain fields was feed a-plenty, and every morning at dawn, and again every afternoon, an hour or so before sundown, Honker led the way to the fields. During the great part of the day and all

night they rested and slept on the bar of a river, or well out on the bosom of a lake.

It was now that Tommy learned a new respect for the cunning of the wise old leader, and also that terrible fear which comes sooner or later to all wild creatures — the fear of man. Time and again, as they approached their chosen feeding-ground, there would come a sharp signal from Honker, and he would abruptly turn the direction of the flight and lead them to another and much poorer feeding-ground. Yet, look as he would, Tommy could see no cause, no danger.

At first Tommy thought it was because other geese seemed to have reached the feeding-ground first. He could see them standing stiffly as if watching the

newcomers, near them a harmless little heap of straw. He knew that the feeding was better there, and he wanted to go, but the spirit of obedience was strong within him, and he followed with the rest. Once he voiced his disapproval to another bird as they settled some distance away where it was more work to find the scattered grain.

"Watch!" he replied in a low tone. "There comes a flock led by that young upstart who fought and defeated his old leader the day before we left home. He is leading them straight over there."

Tommy watched. Suddenly from that harmless-looking little heap of straw there sprang two spurts of flame, followed by two sharp reports that struck terror to his heart. Even as he beat his way into the air, he looked and

saw that foolish young leader and two of his flock falling, stricken and helpless, to the earth, and a man leap from under the straw to pick them up. Then he understood, and a new loyalty to old Honker grew in his heart.

But in spite of the ever-present danger Honker kept his flock there, for food was good and plentiful, and he had faith in himself, and his flock had faith in him. So they lingered, until a driving snow squall warned them that they must be moving. Keeping just ahead of the on-coming winter, they journeyed south, and at every stopping-place they found men and guns waiting. There was no little pond so lonely but that death might be lurking there.

Sometimes the call of their own kind would come up to them. Looking down,

they would see geese swimming in seeming security and calling to them to come down and join them. More than once Honker set his wings to accept the invitation, only to once more beat his way upward as his keen eyes detected something amiss on the shore. And so Tommy learned the baseness of man who would use their own kind to decoy them to death.

Came at last a sudden swift advance of cold weather which forced them to fly all night. When day broke, they were weary of wing, and, worse, the air was thick with driving snow. For the first time, Tommy beheld Honker uncertain. He still led the flock, but he led he knew not where, for in the driving snow none could see.

Low they flew now, but a little way

above the earth, making little progress against the driving storm, and so weary of wing that it was all they could do to keep their heavy bodies up. It was then that the welcome honk of other geese came up to them, and, heading in the direction of the calling voices and honking back their distress, they discovered water below, and gladly, oh, so gladly, set their wings and dropped down into this haven of refuge.

Hardly had the first ones hit the water when, bang! bang! bang! bang! the fateful guns roared, and when, out of the confusion into which they were thrown, they once more gathered behind their old leader far out in the middle of the pond, some of the flock were missing.

In clear weather they flew high, and it happened on such a day that, as

Tommy looked down, there stirred within him a strange feeling. Below stretched a green forest with broad meadows beyond, and farther still an old brush-grown pasture. Somehow it was wonderfully familiar. Eagerly he looked. There should be something more. Ah, there it was — an old gray boulder overlooking the meadows! Like a magnet, it seemed to draw Tommy down to itself. "*Honk*, *honk*, *honk*, *k'honk!*" Tommy heard the call of his old leader faintly, as if from a distance.

"*Honk*, *honk*, *honk*, *k'honk*, *honk*, *k'honk*, *honk!*" Tommy opened his eyes and rubbed them confusedly. Where was he? "*Honk*, *honk*, *honk*, *k'honk*, *honk*, *k'honk!*" He looked up. There, high in the blue sky, was a living wedge

pointing straight into the North, and the joy of the spring was in the wild clamor that came down to him.

Slowly he rose from the old wishing-stone, and, with his hands thrust in his pockets, watched the flock until it was swallowed up in the distant haze. Long he stood gazing through unseeing eyes while the wild notes still came to him faintly, and the joy of them rang in his heart. But there was no longing there now, only a vast content.

"It must be great to fly like that!" he murmured. "It must be great, but——" He drew a long breath as he looked over the meadows to the Old Pasture and heard and saw and felt the joy of the spring — "this is good enough for me!" he finished. "I don't envy that old leader a bit. It may be glor-

ious to be wild and free, to look down and see the Great World, and all that, but it's more glorious to be safe and carefree, and — and just a boy. No, I don't envy old Honker a little bit. But isn't he wonderful! I — I don't see what men want to hunt him for and try to kill him. They wouldn't if they knew how wonderful he is. I never will. No, sir. I never will! I know how it feels to be hunted, and — and it's dreadful. That's what it is — dreadful! I know! And it's all because of the old wishing-stone. I'm glad I know, and — and — gee, I'm glad it's spring!"

"*Honk*, *honk*, *honk*, *k'honk*, *honk*, *k'honk*." Another flock of geese were passing over, and Tommy knew that they, too, were glad, oh, so glad, that it was spring!

Two of Tommy's acquaintances, Reddy Fox and Jerry Muskrat, he thought he knew all about, but he found that there was much he didn't know. And there were two who live deep in the Great Woods whom he had never seen, Paddy the Beaver and Buster Bear. So to the friendly old wishing-stone Tommy went and what he learned there you may learn from the next volume, Tommy's Change of Heart.